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The Role of Social Anxiety in Anger against Norm Violations

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Anger plays a crucial role in relationships as a signal indicating the relational norms that regulate social interactions, that is, the responsibility for a partner’s needs. Because people expect a close other to behave according to communal norms, they feel anger when that person does not respond to their needs. However, some people who apprehend negative responses by others are often concerned about acceptance from everyone, which suggests that they may expect even a not-close other to behave according to the norms. We predicted that when not-close others do not respond to individuals’ needs, the individuals with a high fear of negative evaluation (FNE) would feel more anger than those with low FNE. We asked 116 Japanese university students to answer a questionnaire consisting of four scenarios that depict social interactional situations in which a same-sex partner (friend vs. mere acquaintance) does not respond to the participant’s needs, and to rate the intensity of anger and perceived communal norm violation in each scenario. Then, we asked them to complete the FNE scale. Consistent with our predictions, the results indicated that in the not-close condition, high FNE increased the perception of communal norm violation, which in turn intensified anger. This result suggested that FNE generates impulsive responses to social rejection.

Key words: anger, social anxiety, norm violation, relationships

Introduction

Frijda (1988) and Schwarz (1990) postulated that emotion is an internal signal indicating congruence or incongruence between the self and the environment. This theory suggests that anger indicates that the other has violated relational norms regulating social interactions. Relational norms refer to expectations regarding others’ behaviors and attitudes, which are phrased as “should” or “should not” (e.g., Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Ferguson & Rule, 1983; Lee & Tedeschi, 1996; Turiel, 1983). Assuming that anger serves as a signal to indicate relational norm violations, we attempted in the present study to examine the effect of relationship type and personality disposition on the association between perceived norm violations and anger.

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Social Interactions are Regulated by Responsibility for the Partner’s Needs

What kinds of relational norms regulate social interactions? Clark and her colleagues (Clark & Chrisman, 1994; Clark & Mills, 1993) emphasized that a predominant relational norm guiding social interactions is to take responsibility for a partner’s needs. She observed that social interactions in close relationships including family, couples, and close friends are regulated by the responsibility for partner’s needs, labeling it “the communal norm.” This norm obligates individuals to respond to their partner’s welfare and well-being. In an experimental study, Clark (1984, Study 2) allowed participants to choose the color of a pen used in a joint task. It was found that participants less frequently selected pens of colors different from those selected by their partners when the partner was a friend compared to when the partner was a stranger. The results suggest that participants obscured their inputs and considered the partner’s needs according to the communal norm.

On the other hand, in less close relationships, such as mere acquaintances or business colleagues, the responsibility for others’ needs is not important; instead, the norm is that individuals should give benefits to others only in direct proportion to the amount of benefits they receive (Clark & Mills, 1993). Clark labeled this “the exchange norm.” In her study (Clark, 1984, Study 2), participants more frequently chose pens of different colors from the partner in the joint task when the partner was a stranger to distinguish their inputs from those of the partner. This finding suggests that the relational norms for not-close relationships is the equity rule and that it is inappropriate in this type of relationship for the individuals to expect that the other should take responsibility for their needs.

An integration of Clark’s theory and the anger signal theory leads us to assume that when a close other does not respond to individuals’ needs, they perceive it as a norm violation and feel anger against it, but individuals do not perceive it so when a not-close other does not respond to their needs.

Anger as a Response to Norm Violations and Social Anxiety

Consistent with this assumption, Uehara, Funaki, and Ohbuchi (in press) found in a role-playing study that participants reported less anger when a not-close other did not respond to their needs than when a close other did not respond to them. Their results suggest that individuals do not expect the other in not-close relationships to respond to their needs. However, there may be individual differences in the tendency to expect response to needs. Some may differentially expect the other’s response depending on the relationship, disclosing one’s need only to close friends (e.g., Feeney, 1999), whereas others may communicate their needs even to strangers by, for example, expressing their anger in public (e.g., Clark & Finkel, 2005).

A need to belong is a fundamental human drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For this reason, people seek social connectedness and have a desire for secure and stable relationships. Because social rewards including love, sympathy, or respect are given only in close relationships (Buss, 1986), a need to belong motivates people to obtain them by a wide variety
of strategies. There may be individual differences in this need. Individuals with a chronically high need to belong may be concerned with belongingness or affiliation even in a satisfactory social environment (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). They may not only be engaged in communal social interactions even with not-close others, but also expect the other to be equally engaged.

However, not all of those with a high need to belong feel anger when not-close others do not respond to their needs. Only individuals who are chronically apprehensive of receiving negative response by others may feel anger. In an experimental study, Ayduk, Gyurak, and Luerssen (2008) informed participants that they were not chosen as a dating partner by (ostensible) opposite sex participants. It was found that individuals with high sensitivity toward rejection allocated a lot of hot sauce to the ostensible other participant, knowing that he/she disliked spicy food. Barnes, Carvallo, Brown, and Osterman (2010, Study 3) assumed that individuals with a high need to belong have an urge to belong but experience insecurity over their belongingness, showing that those who have a desire to belong exhibited difficulty in forgiving. These findings suggest that not-close others’ unresponsiveness to their needs causes anger in individuals who fear others’ negative response. From this perspective, we assumed that the fear of negative evaluation (FNE) as the personality disposition evokes anger.

As mentioned above, social rewards such as love or sympathy are given predominantly in close relationships. To obtain these rewards, people actively engage in social interactions with others. However, those who apprehend negative evaluation may regard social interactions as a potential source of threat (Leary, 1983). Individuals with high FNE may anticipate that others will dislike them (Maddux, Norton, & Leary, 1988), and they may experience a strong emotional sting if it really happens.

For the following reason, we assumed that when not-close others do not respond to their needs, individuals with high FNE experience anger. In general, compared with close others, not-close others respond less positively to one’s own needs. Therefore, most people optimistically interpret the other’s negative responsiveness as simply something everyone experiences, not attributing it to any internal factors (Ayduk et al., 2008; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). In contrast, some who fear others’ negative responsiveness may tend to perceive others’ snub response as maliciously rejecting them because of a hostile intent behind the other’s behavior (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Consequently, they may form more negative evaluations of strangers who they perceive reject them (Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen, & Shoda, 1999), or they exhibit more words and deeds signaling anger during interactions (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Given these findings, it is assumed that when interacting with not-close others, individuals with high FNE may not only engage in communal social interactions, but also expect the other to do so. Because of their expectation alone, they feel upset when others do not engage in interactions and they interpret others’ behavior as malicious rejection. Therefore, we predicted that individuals with high FNE will perceive a not-close other’s unresponsiveness as a norm violation, and so they will feel anger.
Predictions

Assuming that anger signals the relational norm violation, we attempted to examine the effects of relationship type and FNE on the association between perceived norm violations and anger. Based on the above discussion, we predicted that FNE would affect the perception of communal norm violation, which in turn would affect anger when the not-close other do not respond to their needs. In other words, we predicted that the association between FNE and anger would be mediated by the perception of the communal norm violation in case of not-close condition but not in the close condition.

Overview of the Present Study

To test the above hypotheses, we conducted a role-taking study, presenting Japanese participants with a set of scenarios in which a same-sex partner did not respond to participant's needs. Each set included scenarios depicting the four types of specific needs (respect, praise, sympathy, and love). Participants were randomly assigned into the close condition (friend) or the not-close condition (mere acquaintance). Participants rated the intensity of anger they experienced and rated how the partner violated the communal norm. Finally, they completed the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale.

Method

Participants

The participants were Japanese students at a private university. They were asked to participate for partial course credit in a psychology class. The 123 students (45 males and 78 females) who agreed to take part in the study received a questionnaire titled “Psychological Survey of Interpersonal Relationships” during a class session and were asked to bring it back completed in an upcoming session. The mean age was 19.47 years and the SD was 1.67.

Procedure and Scenarios

Assuming that an individual has a need for social rewards in social interactions, we constructed scenarios in which a partner did not respond to their need. We prepared four basic scenarios in which a protagonist desires respect, praise, sympathy, or love from others (Buss, 1986; Foa, Converse, Tornblom, & Foa, 1993; Foa & Foa, 1974). In the respect scenario, the protagonist expected the partner to celebrate his/her birthday. In the praise scenario, the protagonist got a good grade for a presentation in a seminar, so he/she expected the partner to praise it. In the sympathy scenario, the protagonist lost his/her treasured pet, so he/she expected the partner to offer comfort. In the love scenario, the protagonist saw the partner talk with a person whom he/she disliked, so he/she expected the partner not to become friends with the person.

Next, two versions were developed for each scenario. In the close version, the partner who did not respond to needs was described as a same-sex friend. In the not-close version,
the partner was described as a same-sex mere acquaintance. Each participant was randomly assigned to each of the two versions and were given the four scenarios in each version: respect, praise, sympathy, and love. The protagonist in the scenarios was labeled “you,” and participants were instructed to read the scenarios as though they were the protagonists. The order of presentation of the scenarios was random.

**Dependent Measures**

After reading each scenario, the participants were asked to rate the episode in terms of the following scale.

*Angry feelings.* To measure anger, we used three of the nine adjectives that were developed by Batson, Kennedy, Nord, Stocks, Fleming, Marzette, Lishner, Hayes, Kolchinsky, and Zerger (2007). We asked each participant to indicate how strongly he or she would feel irritated, angry, and upset if they encountered the scenarios by rating each feeling on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very strongly).

*Perceived violation of the communal norm.* We developed two original items expressing communal norms: “Although the partner should willingly respond to my needs, he or she did not do so” and “The partner should not be unconcerned with what you want him or her to do.” We asked each participant to indicate the extent to which he or she perceived that the partner had violated the communal norm by rating the violation on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (definitely).

*Manipulation checks.* To examine whether relationship manipulation was effective, we constructed two items: “Until this episode, the relationship between you and the partner was that both care for each other” and “Until this episode, the relationship between you and the partner was that both help each other.” We asked participants to indicate the extent to which he or she perceived the relationship involved responsibility for each other’s needs before the episode by rating needs responsibility on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (definitely).

*Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale.* After rating the items for each scenario, we presented the 12-item Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (e.g., “I am afraid others will not approve of me,” “I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings”) developed by Leary (1983) to assess the core component of social anxiety. We instructed the participants to indicate how characteristic the items were of them by rating the characteristics on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).
Results

Seven participants were eliminated from the analysis because they did not complete the questionnaire. As a result, the responses of the remaining 116 participants (41 males and 75 females) were analyzed ($M_{age} = 19.46, SD = 1.68$).

Scale Analysis

Alphas of the anger scale (three items) were .93 for the respect scenario, .89 for the praise scenario, .88 for the sympathy scenario, and .93 for the love scenario. Correlations between two items for the perceived violation of communal norm were $r(114) = .81, p < .001$ for the respect scenario, $r(114) = .39, p < .001$ for the praise scenario, $r(114) = .69, p < .001$ for the sympathy scenario, and $r(114) = .71, p < .001$ for the love scenario. Correlations between two items for the perception of responsibility for needs were $r(114) = .55, p < .001$ for the respect scenario, $r(114) = .55, p < .001$ for the praise scenario, $r(113) = .46, p < .001$ for the sympathy scenario, and $r(114) = .54, p < .001$ for the love scenario. The results indicate that the reliability of these scales were satisfactorily high for all scenarios. We then computed the scale scores for each scenario by averaging the item scores.

The alpha of the 12-item FNE scale was .88, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. We determined the FNE scores by averaging the item scores. The mean score of the FNE scale, $M = 3.08, SD = 0.99$, was substantially higher than the midpoint (2.50) of the scale, implying that the participants generally had a high fear of negative evaluation. In some analysis, we divided participants into two groups on the basis of the average, $3.08$: $n$ of the high FNE group was 65 and that of the low FNE group was 51.

Effectiveness of the Relationship Manipulation

To examine the effectiveness of the relationship manipulation, a 2 (relationship type) $\times$ 2 (FNE) $\times$ 4 (scenario) ANOVA was performed on the perception of responsibility for needs across the four scenarios. Relationship type and FNE (discrete variable) were between-participant variables, and scenario (respect, praise, sympathy, and love) was a within-participant variable. One main effect of relationship type was significant, $F (1, 110) = 9.33, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$: participants rated that the partner had more responsibility for needs in the close condition ($M = 1.56$) than in the not-close condition ($M = 1.00$). A significant main effect of scenario, $F (3, 330) = 3.32, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, indicates that the perception of responsibility for needs differed across the scenarios: participants rated the partner as having marginally more responsibility for needs in the sympathy scenario ($M = 1.40$) than in the respect scenario ($M = 1.15$), $p = .051$. There were no other significant effects.

There was an unexpected difference between the scenarios in the perception of responsibility for needs. Because it was only marginal and the main effect of the manipulation of the relationships was remarkable, the results indicate that our manipulation was almost entirely successful.
**Effects of Relationship Type and FNE on Perceived Violation of Communal Norm**

We determined the scores of perceived violation of communal norm by averaging item scores across scenarios. To examine the effects of relationship type and FNE on perceived communal norm violation, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis by using the forced entry method. In Model 1, as seen in Table 1, we entered the relationship type and FNE (continuous variable) as independent variables and the perceived communal norm violation as a dependent variable into the regression equation. We used a dummy-coded term for relationship type: \(-1\) (not-close condition) and \(1\) (close condition). In Model 2, we added a two-way interaction term of relationship type and FNE to the equation. To suppress multicollinearity caused by correlations between the independent variables, we standardized the scores of all the variables within each participant. By controlling gender, \(-1\) (male) and \(1\) (female), the same analyses revealed that gender had no significant effect in any analysis. Therefore, we eliminated gender from the following analyses.

The first and second columns of Table 1 show the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for perceived communal norm violation. It reveals that only the main effect of FNE was significant: it increased the perception of communal norm violation. However, changes in \(R^2\) and \(F\) were not significant in both models.

**Effects of Relationship Type and FNE on Angry Feelings**

We determined the scores of anger index by averaging the item scores across scenarios. In addition, we conducted the same statistical procedures for the anger scores as for the violation scores. The results are shown in the third and fourth columns of Table 1. In Model 1, only FNE significantly increased angry feelings, but in Model 2 (the fourth column), \(R^2\) was significantly increased when a two-way interaction term between relationship type and FNE was added to the equation. We performed a simple slope analysis to examine the effects.

### Table 1 Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Perceived Communal Norm Violation or Angry Feelings by Relationship Type and Fear of Internal Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Perceived communal norm violation</th>
<th>Anqy feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship type</td>
<td>(b / \beta)</td>
<td>(b / \beta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNE</td>
<td>(.01 / -.01)</td>
<td>(.01 / -.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship type (\times) FNE</td>
<td>(.17 / .19)</td>
<td>(.16 / .17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2 / \text{Adjusted} R^2)</td>
<td>(.04 / .02)</td>
<td>(.04 / .02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 116, perceived communal norm violation; N = 115, angry feelings. Relationship type was coded dichotomously, \(-1\) (not close) and \(1\) (close). FNE = fear of negative evaluation. Perceived communal norm violation was measured by averaging responses (0–5 scale) to the two items (e.g., *Although the partner should willingly respond to my needs, he or she did not do so*). Angry feelings were measured by averaging responses (0–5 scale) to the three anger adjectives (irritated, angry, and upset). \(\dagger p < .10, *p < .05.*\)
of FNE at two levels of relationship (Aiken & West, 1991). Figure 1 indicates that FNE significantly increased angry feelings in the not-close condition, \( b = .37, t(111) = 3.24, p < .01 \), but not in the close condition, \( b = -.02, |t| < 1.0 \). We then conducted a simple slope analysis to examine the effects of relationship at two levels of FNE. The results indicated that the close other non-significantly increased angry feelings only among the low FNE participants, \( b = .23, t(111) = 1.81, p = .07 \).

**Indirect Effect of FNE on Angry Feelings through Perceived Violation of Communal Norm**

According to the results of hierarchical regression analysis, participants with high FNE felt anger when not-close others as well as close others did not respond to their needs. Was the anger against the not-close others caused by perceiving that the other did not respond to needs? To test the hypothesis that the association between FNE and anger will be mediated by perceived communal norm violation, we conducted a mediation analysis separately in the not-close and close conditions by using a series of regressions (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

In the not-close condition \( (n = 57) \), first, by entering FNE into a regression equation predicting the perception of communal norm violation, we found that FNE significantly increased the perception, \( b = .22, t(55) = 2.03, p < .05 \), as shown in Figure 2. Second, by entering FNE into a regression equation predicting angry feelings, we found that FNE significantly increased angry feelings, \( b = .38, t(55) = 3.26, p < .01 \). Finally, after we added the perception of communal norm violation to the equation, \( R^2 \) changed greatly, \( \Delta R^2 = .45, p < .01 \).

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Angry feelings as a function of relationship type and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). The \( b \) coefficients were estimated based on the following formula: angry feelings = 1.03 + 0.04 (relationship type) + 0.18 (FNE) −0.20 (relationship type × FNE).

**p < .01.**
Figure 2. Mediational analysis of perceived communal norm violation on the relationship between fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and angry feelings in the not-close condition. Unstandardized $b$ coefficients are reported. The coefficients in parentheses are $b$ and error in the simple regression of angry feelings by FNE. The bootstrapping method (with 10,000 resamples) produced a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect that ranged from .0346 to .3215, $n = 57$.

- *$p < .05$*
- **$p < .01$**
- ***$p < .001$***

The perception of communal norm violation was a significant predictor of angry feelings, $b = .78$, $t(54) = 7.93$, $p < .001$, and the direct effect of FNE on angry feelings significantly decreased, $b = .20$, $t(54) = 2.49$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that the effect of FNE on angry feelings was partially mediated by the perceived communal norm violation. Using the bootstrapping technique (with 10,000 resamples) recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004), we then tested the indirect effect of FNE on angry feelings by way of the perception of communal norm violation. The 95% confidence interval for the true indirect effect was estimated to lie between .0346 and .3215, which does not include zero, so it is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). Thus, we concluded that FNE affected the perception of communal norm violation of the non-close others, which in turn affected angry feelings.

We did not, however, test the mediation model for the close condition ($n = 58$) because the effect of FNE neither on the perception of communal norm violation, $b = .11$, $|t| < 1.0$, nor on angry feelings, $b = -.02$, $|t| < 1.0$, were significant. That indicated that the model was not applicable to responses of participants in the close condition.

**Discussion**

Our other role-taking study (Uehara et al., in press) found that participants reported less anger when a not-close other did not respond to their needs than when a close other did not respond to them. This implies that people do not expect the other in not-close relationships to respond to their needs. However, there seem to be individual differences in the tendency to expect others’ responsiveness. Assuming that FNE leads an individual to expect even not-close
others to behave according to the close communal norms, we attempted to examine the effect of relationship type and FNE on the association between the perceived norm violations and anger.

**Anger to Communal Norm Violation among Individuals with a High FNE**

As shown in Figure 2, the results of mediation analysis in the not-close condition suggest that the effect of FNE on angry feelings was mediated by perception of communal norm violation. In the close condition, on the other hand, the mediational model was not valid. Although the two-way interaction term between relationship type and FNE was not significant in the hierarchical regression analysis of perceived communal norm violation, a correlation between FNE and the perception of communal norm violation was significant only in the not-close condition, \( r(55) = .26, p < .05 \), and not in the close condition, \( r(57) = .09, p > .49 \). This suggests that participants high in FNE expected even not-close others to engage in communal interactions, and so they perceived communal norm violation and felt anger when not-close others did not care about their needs. Therefore, our prediction was supported.

The mediation of anger against not-close others by the perceived communal norm violation implies something other than that individuals with high FNE inappropriately expect not-close others to respond to their needs; that is, expecting those who have no obligation to respond to needs may become an impetus toward the development of relationships. As we mentioned above, their over-expectations reflect a desire for social connectedness or secure and stable relationships. If their expectations are accepted by the not-close others, the relationship with the others may become more close than before. This possibility implies an adaptive value for FNE in that it has the potential to motivate the development of a new relationship. However, it may be maladaptive if high FNE individuals expect too much from others who do not want to deepen the relationship.

Individuals high in FNE are likely to regard social interactions as a potential source of threat or harm. Despite this fear, why do they attempt to pursue communal relationships with others? One possible reason is to cope with the fear that others negatively evaluate them. Among individuals who apprehend negative responsiveness by others, some believe that others will not hurt them if they adhere to social interactions (Levy, Ayduk, & Downey, 2001). Thus, they attempt to please their partner and keep the relationship when they feel uncertainty about the future course of the relationship (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Individuals with high FNE may attempt to pursue a communal relationship with others, believing that communal interactions reduce the other's negative evaluations.

**Why Does High FNE Evoke Anger Consistently?**

The results suggest that individuals high in FNE tend to feel anger toward all other persons who do not respond to their needs, whereas individuals low in FNE feel anger only when close others do not respond to their needs. We interpret this finding as suggesting that FNE operates as a defensive mechanism against a source of threat. The theory of a defensive
motivational system (Downey, Mougios, Ayduk, London, & Shoda, 2004; Romero-Canyas & Downey, 2005) postulates that because individuals who apprehend negative responsiveness by others are motivated to defend themselves as quickly as possible under threat, they may exhibit impulsive reactions rather than strategic behaviors. Participants with high FNE felt anger whenever the others did not respond to their needs, whereas the anger of those with low FNE changed depending on whether the other had an actual (close relationship) obligation to respond to their needs. High FNE participants might have impulsively responded to the mere threat of rejection with some kind of defensive mechanism. Our results seem to imply that individuals with high FNE not only expect everyone to respond to their needs irrespective of the kind of relationship, but also feel anger impulsively when others do not respond.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the present study showed that participants with high FNE are expected to be engaged in communal interactions with even not-close others, several limitations should be noted before generalizing the findings. First, we assumed that not all people who have a high need to belong but only those who fear negative evaluation feel anger toward not-close others who do not respond to their needs. However, because individual differences in the need to belong were not directly measured in the present study, we should refrain from concluding that anger against not-close others is unique among high FNE individuals.

Second, it should be noted that participants felt only mild anger even when a partner did not respond to their needs, which was demonstrated by the generally low mean score of angry feelings, $M = 1.05$, $SD = 0.99$. One possible reason for this is that each scenario depicted the frustration of only one social reward. In real social interactions, people are usually concerned with multiple social rewards, such as an individual expecting to be liked as well as respected by the other. If the scenarios had involved frustration of multiple needs, participants may have reported more anger. Future research must examine this possibility.

In summary, we found in the present study that participants with high FNE expected to be engaged in communal interactions even with not-close others, suggesting that perceived communal norm violation mediated the relationship between FNE and anger. We found that high FNE participants’ anger against not-close others reflected the adaptive function of their FNE in the development of close relationship and that this was caused by their over-expectation of the other’s responsibility for their needs. Furthermore, participants with high FNE were likely to feel anger toward every kind of others who did not respond to their needs, suggesting that FNE generated impulsive responses to the rejection as a kind of defensive mechanism.

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